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THE
EXCELLENCE and UTILITY
OF THE
GRACE OF HOPE,
CONSIDERED IN A
CIRCULAR LETTER
FROM THE
BAPTIST MINISTERS and MESSENGERS

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Assembled at OLNEY, in BUCKINGHAMSHIRE,

June 4, 5, and 6, 1782.



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Maintaining the important Doctrines of three equal Persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal Election; original Sin; particular Redemption; free Justification by the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the final Perseverance of Saints; and the Independency, or congregational Order of the Churches of Christ inviolable.

To the several Churches they represent, or have received Letters from, meeting at Sutton-Ashfield, Nottingham, Sheephead, Leicester, Sutton-in-the-Elms, Arnesby, Foxton, Clipstone, Oakham, Soham, Kettering, Walgrave, Northampton, Road, Olney, and St. Alban's; as also the many Churches not yet in the Association, who, notwithstanding, countenance it, by the Attendance of their Ministers and many of their Members:—

Dear Brethren,

THROUGH the tender mercy of our and your God we are spared to address you, and you to be addressed by us on another of these occasions. Soon and we shall be addressed by the Lord our Judge, either with a *come ye blessed* or *go ye cursed*! Your letters inform us of several whom we addressed last year as we now do you, who have since taken their leave of time, and fallen asleep, some of whom especially, were persons of real eminence. Such providences may be the voice of God contending with his churches; they certainly are the voice of God calling to us who survive, *Be ye also ready! Work while it is called to day; the night cometh when no man can work!*

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While we lament with you, the loss of such pillars in society, we wish there was nothing amongst us worthy of greater lamentation. Our diminutions are not all made by death! There is a mixture of joy accompanies our sorrow over those whom God takes away; but different feelings exercise us concerning those whom sin takes away. We would lament over those whom we have thus lost with bitter lamentation. It grieves us especially to see so many excluded, and but *one* restored! We solemnly charge you all, and ourselves with you, as we must answer it to God, to take heed lest we cherish in us some root of bitterness, and so depart from the living God! Beware of indulging a neglect of private duties, or public ordinances. Beware of slighting your privileges, and sinking into a spirit of supineness. These are commonly the fore-runners of something worse; frequently of open falls, and sometimes of awful apostasies!

However, we bless God he hath not left us without cause for thankfulness. We have still grounds for joy. God has added some to us in the room of those that the combined powers of sin and death have taken from us. We still see his promise accomplished, that *a seed shall serve him*—and that *instead of the fathers shall rise up children*. We pray they may behave like *princes in the earth*! Nor would we be unthankful that though there are some unhappinesses among some of you, yet peace and love in general prevail in the churches; blessings which we are too insensible of, seldom knowing the worth of them but by the want of them. Add to these, that we esteem it none of the least of our mercies that time is wearing away, and we trust our salvation drawing on. Amidst a thousand discouragements which we have to endure as men, as christians, as ministers, as members of society, one thing yields relief, namely the prospect of a glorious immortality, *Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our saviour Jesus Christ*.

On this delightful subject, brethren, we take pleasure in addressing you. We congratulate you amidst all your sorrows on your possessing such an *hope*; an hope which hath foundations the most solid, and objects the most substantial. God hath not put this jewel into your hands to be made light of. He would have you to understand it in order to prize it. His bestowing upon you a spiritual illumination is to this very end. He doth not open your eyes to present you with mere spectacles of misery, nor call you by his grace as having nothing to bestow upon you; no, blessed be his name, *The eyes of your understandings are enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*.*

To assist your meditations on this cheering subject by shewing its excellency, and pointing out its great utility, we devote this epistle.

We trust that what we have already communicated to you on various important subjects, has not been received in vain. We would not wish to trifle with you brethren, and we trust our letters to you have not been trifled with. Having therefore confidence in your readiness to examine and receive what we communicate, *We are willing to impart unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye are dear unto us*.

HOPE, or an expectation of future good; § is of so extensive an influence,

* Ep. i. 13.

§ Hope, as it's objects are future is distinguished from enjoyment. Herein the portion of the saints is unlike that of the worldling, and even that of saints in glory. . . .

ence, that whether true or false, well or ill founded, it is one of the principal springs that keep all mankind in motion. It is vigorous, bold, and enterprising. It causes men to encounter dangers, endure hardships, and surmount difficulties innumerable, in order to accomplish the desired end. In religion it is of no less consequence. It is claimed by almost all ranks and parties of men.---It makes a considerable part of the religion of those that truly fear God: for though in all true religion there is and must be a love to God and divine things for their own excellency; yet God, who knows our frame, and draws us with the *cords of a man*,* condescends also to excite us with the promise of gracious rewards, and allure us with the prospect of a crown of glory.

We wish you, brethren, seeing God hath given you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, to consider well the GOODNESS or EXCELLENCY of that divine gift. On this account it excels every other hope as much as a pearl excels a pebble. A great part of it's excellency consists in it's being so *well founded*. Though our hope should aspire to the highest heavens, and could grasp in all the bliss of an eternal world, alas, what would it avail us if ill-founded? That hope is said to *make ashamed*, that is ill-founded and so terminates in disappointment.† It is to be feared that many (O that there may be none of us!) who are now towering high in expectation, will one day be *ashamed and confounded because they thus had hoped*.

The grand FOUNDATION of all good hope is *The Lord Jesus Christ, God's revealed Mediator, embraced by faith*.---On this rock the people of God in all ages have built their hope, whatever other foundations sinners have devised. Of old God said this in Zion.‡ This was the subject of apostolic ministrations; they held forth none other than him *whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood*.§

That the mediation of Christ is the primary ground of all good hope, will appear evident if we do but recollect (and O, let us never forget!) the hopeless condition in which sin involved us. By our breach of covenant with God the very idea of future good for us was totally annihilated. Nothing but eternal tribulation and anguish as the reward of evil doers was now to be expected. The image of God being totally effaced in us, his favour towards us was absolutely forfeited. Hence the least idea of hope from any other ground than the mediation of Christ is not only declarative of opposition to God's way of salvation, but is altogether a wild chimera. By the state of the fallen angels we may learn what ground is left for hope where no mediator is provided; and what must have been our state had we been left in their condition? These, void of all hope whatever, *are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day!*||

We are not unacquainted with the many false grounds on which sinners rest their hopes, but we as well know who hath said, *Other foundations*

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Also from *love*, the objects of which are past and present as well as future, whereas hope is confined to the *last*. As they are *good* it is opposed to *fear*, which is the dread of evil. As they are both *future* and *good*, and merely so, it is distinct from *faith*: We may be said to believe things past, as that the worlds were made, and things evil, as the wrath to come, but cannot be said to hope in either. As it is an *expectation* it is distinguished from *desire*. We may be said to desire what it is not possible we should ever enjoy; but we cannot hope unless there appear at least a possibility, and generally speaking some probability of our possessing the object hoped for: and in proportion as this probability appears to the mind, great or small, hope or expectation is strong or weak.

* Hof. xi. 4. † Job. vi. 20. ‡ Is. xxviii. 16. § Rom. iii. 25. || Jude 6.

can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¶ We doubt not brethren, but you have seen into the vanity of a multitude of those things which buoy up the hopes of a great part of mankind. Yourselves it may be, were once the subjects of those delusory dreams whereof we trust ye are now ashamed. It yields us great pain to see such numbers of our fellow sinners standing on such *slippery places*! The mere mercy of God to the exclusion of Christ's mediation—not being so bad as some others—common honesty and civility between man and man—descent from pious parents—a place and a name among the godly—suffering much affliction in this life—legal convictions—superior knowledge—superstitious zeal; these are some of the dangerous foundations, on which vast numbers of deluded mortals build their eternal ALL! But ye brethren have not so learned Christ. Be it your and our resolution with holy Paul to *know nothing* in this matter *but Christ and him crucified*!

You will remember dear brethren, it was necessary that this glorious Mediator should be *revealed* ere he could become a ground of hope. The amazing design of mercy was first laid in eternal council, hence the blood of Christ is termed the blood of the covenant through which prisoners in the pit become prisoners of hope.* but whatever *design* of mercy might exist in the *mind* of God, that could not become a ground of hope till revealed by the *word* of God. Hence the *promise* of the woman's seed afforded the first and only dawn of hope to a lost world. Hence also the *word of God* is frequently represented in scripture as that whereon our hope resteth.†

Equally necessary is it that the mediation of Christ should be *embraced by faith*. We trust you need not be told that though this mediation be the sole *meritorious* ground of our hope, yet a special work of the Spirit of God must take place in us, before we can reasonably put in our claim for eternal bliss. The work of Christ gives to the elect sinner a *title* to it's possession; the work of the Spirit gives a *meanness* for it's enjoyment. If we experience the latter, we may lay claim to a personal interest in the former. These God hath joined together, and let no man dare to put them asunder. Christ must be *in* us ere he can be to us the hope of glory.‡ That hope that maketh not ashamed is wrought by *experience*.§ The graces of the Spirit however, become a ground of hope not through any inherent *merit*, but in virtue of the *promise* of God; or rather they are the evidence of our interest in the promise. In numerous passages of holy writ, God hath promised eternal life to all such as bear certain characters: namely to those that are of a broken and contrite spirit, that mourn for sin, believe in Christ, love him in sincerity, deny themselves, take up their cross, follow him, &c. &c. Hence, all, who through grace are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions, enjoy a right, founded on such promises, to hope for eternal bliss: and this is another reason, why the *word of God* is frequently represented in scripture, as that whereon our hope resteth.¶

It is to be feared that many split upon this rock. We cautioned you against those who *professedly* build on other foundations than Jesus Christ; but these are not the only self-deceivers. There is a more refined sort, as to their professed principles, who build their hope on something more specious in appearance, but not a whit better in reality. These brethren

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¶ 1 Cor. iii. 11. * Zech. ix. 11, 12. † See Ps. cxix. 41, 74, 81, 114. CXXX. 5.

‡ Col. i. 27. § See Ps. cxix. 42, 43, 49, 147.

you have more reason to be guarded against, since they are more frequent in your assemblies, and some of them less discernable though not less dangerous than the former. These will frequently abound with supercilious treatment towards those who profess to build upon their own works—will abundantly exclaim against legal books and legal preaching; which, by the way, is the name they give not only to those performances wherein men are taught to expect eternal life as the fruit of their own doings, but as well to all those wherein practical godliness is pressed home.—These much value themselves for their supposed orthodoxy, or soundness in the doctrines of grace; nay so valiant are they, many of them, for the TRUTH, that they will contend for it even at the Tavern or upon the ale bench! but they seem to have forgotten that part of sound doctrine, that *faith without works is dead being alone.*† These talk loudly of building their hopes on Christ alone; but forget that he must be as one says, a Christ believed in, loved, and obeyed, and not merely a Christ talked of.—These are frequently heard boasting how strong their hopes are, of their being delivered from slavish fear, of their certainty of going to heaven die when they may, with many such presumptuous things; but they forget surely what the judge of all the earth hath said, *'Tis not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven.*¶—These, whatever their professions may be, build not upon the rock of ages; but upon a *concealed part of self.* There is no such great difference between them and professed legalists, against whom they so bitterly inveigh: those think to gain heaven by *doing*, and these by *knowing*, which they think to be *believing*. Their hope is but the hope of the hypocrite which will in the end prove no better than the spider's web.—Nor do they draw their evidences for glory, from such things as the scriptures speak of as characterizing the godly, but from their supposed orthodoxy or soundness in religious principles, with, perhaps, some *texts of scripture* which may have fallen upon their minds with a certain impulse, tending mightily to lift them up with joy, but not to fill them with holy mourning, or self-loathing, or with a desire and endeavour to walk humbly with God. Real religion has no worse enemies than these. By approaching near unto it, and being accounted it's votaries, they are capable of doing it much more injury than it's professed foes. While, Joab-like they embrace it with a dissimulating kiss, by their works they stab it as under it's *fifth rib*!

We do not mean to suggest but that the holy scriptures are often of great consolation to the godly; nor yet to deny that some passages of it may be more consolatory to the godly than others; and the same passages at one time which are not at another: these are things which we freely acknowledge and happily experience. For the truth or duty contained in any passage of scripture, to be by the spirit of God opened to the mind, and impressed upon the heart, and afford strong consolation to the person, is a part of experience which we can set seal to, as both reasonable and desirable. It is *through patience and comfort of the scriptures that we have hope.*|| But when

† Besides, it would be no great difficulty to prove that these people with all their boasted soundness are unbelievers in the very *essentials* of the gospel. That is an essential of the gospel, without which it would not be the gospel. Now what constitutes it gospel is it's being *good news*; but whatever faith such people may have in it as a piece of *news*, they have none in the *goodness* of it, which is a most essential thing in it, and without which it would not be the gospel.—Review dear brethren, our last year's letter to you on this important subject, especially page 7.

¶ Matt. vii. 21. || Rom. xv. 4.

when impressions have no tendency to humble, sanctify, and lead the soul to God, we affirm, and are ready to give proof that they are no better than *lying vanities*, though they lie at the bottom of some mighty fabrics. Our having certain passages of scripture impressed upon our minds, is in itself no evidence for glory at all, either to ourselves nor others; no, not though those passages should be promises of heaven itself; but if by this we are humbled and sanctified; if a spirit of holy mourning, self-loathing, watchfulness, love to Christ and holiness, as well as joy, be hereby wrought in us, *that* is an evidence for glory.

Many persons are the subjects of scripture impressions, and to the great scandal of religion, are *hence* supposed to have God's good work begun in them, when it appears evident by their spirit and conduct that they are utter strangers to real christianity. Balaam could have produced plenty of such evidence as this. All those things of his speaking are recorded as a part, and an excellent part of holy scripture, and were suggested to him even by God himself. *The Lord*, we are told, *put a word in Balaam's Mouth.* § But as none of these things had any tendency to sanctify his heart, they left him but where they found him! Besides, we have no reason to think but that Satan can and doth suggest many things in the words of scripture. We know he did thus to Christ himself; and if to him why not to us? He has ends to answer in so doing; namely to deceive poor souls with such airy dreams, to draw them away from resting their hopes on scriptural grounds, and to substitute these illusory foundations in their room.—On the other hand, whatever be the means, whether hearing the word preached, reading, conversation, prayer, or meditation; and whether, in so meditating, any part of the word be *suddenly* brought to our mind, and impressed upon our heart, or whether it be more *gradually*; whether we have never thought of the passage before, or whether we have read it a thousand times over, it matters not.† If it tend to produce a spirit of pure love to Christ, lowliness and holiness, *that* affords us a ground for hope, and a reason for thankfulness. God hath plentifully promised salvation to all who are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions.

Should an enemy to your holy religion after all require of you a reason for the hope that is in you? Should he demand what grounds you have to conclude that the things you hope for have a *real existence*? we trust you would not be at a loss for a reply. There is not one of all those solid arguments which prove the divinity of the sacred oracles, (which for brevity's sake we forbear to enumerate) but would furnish you with sufficient reason to give an answer substantial in it's nature, though in it's manner *with meekness and fear*.

The glorious OBJECTS with which your hope is conversant next demand your attention, brethren, as they much, very much contribute to it's excellency, and your felicity. You may be assured they are something good. Hope of every kind has to do with nothing but what in the view of the mind appears such, and this hope has to do with nothing but what is really such. That which we hope for is not merely an apparent, but a real good: and not only a good, but a substantial good; not only a substantial but a suitable, a great, yea an everlasting good!

The hope of worldlings terminates on trifles; on things which, when

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§ Numb. xxii. 35--38. xxiii. 5.
† See *Help to Zion's Travellers*, a piece lately published at the request of the Association by our brother Hall, Page 139--141.

enjoyed, do but cloy, and cannot satisfy. Let a man in pursuit of happiness knock at the door of every created good, every created good must answer *it is not in me!* Riches make themselves wings and fly away, honour is empty as the wind; mirth, what is it but madness? Crowns of earthly glory commonly prove crowns of thorns to them that wear them; all are lying vanities, promising what they cannot perform. O, brethren, let the resolve of the church made wise by affliction be our resolve, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.**

Here we find what the wisest of men w^ol termed *substance*,†. Only a taste thereof affords substantial bliss. O, to enjoy God! To enjoy a God in Christ! To enjoy him with the society of the blessed! To enjoy him with soul and body, the latter raised, and re-united to the former! To enjoy him to all eternity! To enjoy him and be changed into the same image! These, brethren, these are the things on which our hope centers: nor is it a matter of small consolation, that God himself hath pledged his faithfulness for their bestowment, on all his faithful followers. However desirable these things might be, we should have little reason to rejoice therein, if he, on whose word it rested, were either false or fickle; but blessed be his name, we live in *hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began! †*

Nor let it seem the less glorious that it is a *future* good. It seemeth good in the view of infinite wisdom, *that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. §* It seemeth good to him to place the blessings he means to bestow upon us at a distance; so at a distance that they must be hoped in, and waited for, ere they are enjoyed. Doubtless God could have bestowed all his blessings on us as quick as he did paradise on the converted thief; but he hath not seen fit in common so to do. Certainly by his suspending for a time our enjoyment of promised favours, and at length bestowing them, he glorifies his faithfulness in the end, as well as that in the mean time he exercises our faithfulness, patience, and resignation to his will. But this is not all: they are the more welcome when they do come. If the object hoped for prove less in value than we expected, then indeed it's having been suspended only sinks it the more in our esteem; but if it surpass all expectation, if it exceed desire itself when it makes it's appearance, then it's having been so long a coming only makes it the more welcome when come. Hope deferred may make the heart sick for a time; but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life! Let us not think much at waiting a little while; no, not though during that time exposed to great tribulations, since our dwelling before the throne will by this be rendered the more blissful, and our *weight of glory* by this increased. With what sacred pleasure did the patriarch Jacob resign his life, having *waited* for God's salvation! ¶ With what unspeakable joy did good old Simeon embrace the *long-look'd-for* blessing! || With what raptures of bliss will the Lord again be welcomed on an approaching period, when all who love his appearing will unite, saying, *Lo, this is our God, we have WAITED for him! ***

Nay, it seems to be a glory in some sense peculiar to religion, *to reserve the best till last.*—That you may enjoy strong consolation brethren, in your passage through life, God hath placed his favours in a glorious ascending

* Lam. iii. 24. † Prov. viii. 21. ‡ Titus i. 2. § Lam. iii. 26. ¶ Gen. xlix. 18. || Luke ii. 29, 30. ** Isaiah xxv. 9.

ascending gradation: the inviting language of every one of them is, *press forward*. The pleasures of the world and sin, if they speak truth, can afford no such encouragement to their admirers: no, Ezekiel's roll is descriptive of their utmost prospects; that roll which had written within and without, *lamentations, mourning, and woe!** But religion presents a train of rising glories; he that enters it aright will find it like the waters of the sanctuary; first to his ancles, then to his knees, then to his loins, and at last a river to swim in!—The different stages of the church maintain the same idea; the *osaic dispensation contained greater discoveries than the patriarchal, the gospel contains greater than the mosaic, latter day glory will out shine this, and ultimate bliss will exceed them all. *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*

Give us your attention brethren, while we next attempt to point out the UTILITY of this heavenly grace throughout the christian life. Truly this is beyond expression. If hope in general is of so much use amongst men, as to stimulate them in all their labours, support them in their sorrows, and extricate them from a thousand labyrinths in life; if by it they brave dangers, encounter hardships, and endure difficulties; if, in short, it be that by which as a mean, even God himself as it were bears up the pillars of the world; then what must be the use of that hope which as we have already seen, so much surpasses this in excellency? As far as the objects of christian hope exceed in value, and it's grounds in solidity those of natural, so far doth the use of the one exceed that of the other. It's special use will however be best ascertained by taking a view of some of those exercises, cases, and circumstances, wherein you are concerned in your passage through life.—Particularly,

You have known it's value from the time when you were first converted unto God, when in that time of need it presented before you an all-sufficient refuge.—You remember, dear brethren, it may be, some of you particularly, *the wormwood and the gall* in that great work, which is commonly begun with a painful conviction of sin. You remember when a sense of the nature and demerit of sin, of *your* sin, was such that your souls had almost dwelt in silence! Ah, you remember when the glorious character of GOD appeared though excellent, yet terrible, approaching judgment unavoidable, and the Judge at the door!—And have you forgotten the *door of hope* which then was opened to you? § Have you forgotten the sound of the great trumpet which invited you to come when you were ready to perish? || no surely! While many like Cain and Judas despair of mercy and so *die in the pit*, you have reason to bless God for having enabled you to *turn to your strong-hold as prisoners of hope!* †

Moreover
As *servants* of God you have a great work to do. Though the meritorious part of your salvation has been long since finished, yet there is a salvation for you still to work out. ‡ By prayer, by patience, by watchfulness, and holy strife, you have to overcome the world, mortify sin, and run the race set before you. Hope is of excellent use in this great work. It is well denominated a *lively* hope. ¶ It's tendency is not to lull the soul asleep, but to rouse it to action. We trust, dear brethren, that the hope of which you are partakers will more and more animate
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* Ezek. ii. 10. § Hos. ii. 15. || If. xxvii. 13. † Zech. ix. 11, 12. ‡ Phil. ii. 12. ¶ 1 Peter i. 3.

your breasts with generous purposes, and prompt your souls to noble pursuits. For this you have the greatest encouragements surely that a GOD can give! God will employ none in his service without making it their inestimable privilege. They that plow for him shall plow in hope. Mansions of bliss stand ready to receive you, and crowns of unfading glory to reward you: *therefore beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*—Again,

You are attended with *indwelling sin*: a body of sin, which in the account of every one that loves and longs for purity, is a body of death; yea worse than death itself! You wish to think spiritually, pray fervently, hear profitably, and in a word, grow in grace; but this proves a dead weight to all: *the good that ye would, that ye do not!* You wish to hate and avoid evil, and all its detestible appearances; but you find it in ten thousand forms haunting, suprising, and drawing you aside, so that too often, *the evil that ye would not, that ye do!*—We doubt not dear brethren that in secret you frequently groan forth with the apostle, *O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the Body of this death!* Now we ask, what can afford relief in this case, but a good hope through grace of being freed at the hour of death? This proves an helmet in your spiritual warfare.* This will inspire you with courage in every conflict; nothing invigorates the soldier like the hope of conquering at last. With this you will tread down strength, and in prospect of approaching victory, sing with the apostle, *I THANK GOD, THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!*†

Again. You are subject to many *fears* and *despondings* of mind ere you reach your desired haven. Too often, through an unwatchful unholy conduct the Spirit of God is grieved. His presence once withdrawn, darkness will overspread the mind, and evidences for glory seem blotted out. Satan is oft permitted at such seasons to stand as at your right hand, accusing you of your filthy garments; suggesting that such an one cannot be a brand plucked out of the burning.§ Under these exercises the mind is apt to be depressed beyond measure, the soul afraid of acting presumptuously in laying hold of consolation, is ready, strangely ready to sink beneath the waves of dark despair. If any offer consolation, like Rachel on the loss of her children, he refuseth to be comforted. The spirit, at some such seasons, is so dejected, it is as if all must be given up. The painful language of the heart is, *the Lord hath forsaken me, and he whom I once thought my God, hath forgotten me! My hope is dried up, and I am cut off for my part!* Ah, farewell hope! farewell heaven! farewell Christ!—No,—no,—nor Christ, nor heaven, nor hope will suffer this! Let deep call to deep, let waves, let billows overflow, deliverance shall arise, hope will not fail, but will afford relief. It will prove an anchor to your soul, sure and steadfast.† Yes, it will cheer your heart, and enable you to sing, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!*|| Again,

You are subject to various *trying providences* in your passage through life. Enjoyments in this life are very precarious. While we are feathering our nests, and promising ourselves that we shall die therein unmolested,

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* 1 Thes. v. 8. † Rom. vii. 19, 24, 25. § Zech. iii. 1, 2, 3. ‡ Heb. vi. 19. || Ps. xlii.

how soon are we disappointed; yea, how many have been nearly stripped of their earthly all! These being deprived of almost every comfort of this life, have then tasted the sweetness of hope in another. These look to their maker, and their eyes have respect to the HOLY ONE of Israel for the reparation of their losses. Thus sang the church in affliction, stripped, and bound in Babel's yoke, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him!**

Some of you are *poor* in this world, and are subject to numerous hardships. You are often entangled in mazes of difficulty, you have a thousand fears that you shall never get honourably through life. Especially at times, God seems to have set you in *dark places*: your hopes confounded, your fears *come* upon you, and your prospects at an end! Yes, say you, *Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travell. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone. He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy!* Poor people, we feel for you! wherewith shall we comfort you? Shall we recommend and exercise benevolence towards you in our respective churches? Shall we exhort you to *trust in the Lord, and do good*; and assure you in God's name, that *SO shall ye dwell in the land, and verily ye shall be fed?*† or shall we hold up before you a kingdom to which ye are heirs, a period when *every tear shall be wiped away!* O brethren, the hope of the gospel furnishes you with these strong consolations! Again,

You are *members of christian society*; and though by your letters it appears you enjoy peace in general, yet you are not unacquainted with many things of a grieving tendency. In this state of imperfection, offences will come. Unhappy feuds will sometimes arise, and grievous scandals will take place. When church-members become self-sufficient, and cease to be afraid of entering into temptation; when carnal ease is substituted in the room of gospel peace; when love grows cold and complaisance takes its place; when we are so watchful over one another as to forget ourselves; when godly jealousy is exchanged for an uncharitable temper *more cruel than the grave*; when instead of *submitting to one another in the fear of God*,‡ each one becomes headstrong and resolved to have his own way; when superior gifts are envied, and inferior ones despised; when zeal for the truth degenerates into vain jangling; when we are very apt to take an offence, but not to forgive one; when tale-bearers are encouraged, and a spirit of animosity cherished; then brethren, then expect *confusion, and every evil work.*§ We are happy that we can say, (and blessed be God for it!) that such a spirit is far from generally prevailing amongst you; yet so far as it does prevail, which the all-seeing God knows is too far, it dishonours the great head of the church, and wounds every upright member! However, this should be far from discouraging religious society *itself*; not to mention that these are things that must always be expected more or less in this state of trial, that they always existed, even in the purest ages; we can affirm, and ye are our witnesses, that it has pleasures which abundantly outweigh all these unhappinesses. Nor is this all: hope holds up a period, even within the limits of time, a heaven compared with the present state of things, when *HOLINESS TO THE LORD shall be written as upon the bells of the horses,*

* Lam. iii. 24. † Ps. xxxvii. 3. ‡ Ep. v. 21. § James iii. 13--18.

berjes, and Sion shall become a *quiet habitation* ! || But this, say you, is a period that we have but little hope of living to see. Perhaps so: still, you live in prospect of a better. Blessed society, where purity and amity for ever reign ! Yes, brethren, immediately on entering members of the church triumphant, you will *enter into peace*, and *each one of you walk for ever in his uprightness* ! * . Moreover,

You are members of *civil society*. You wish well to your country, and must have been the subjects of grief to see what you have of late years seen, it's glory eclipsed by unhappy wars and dissensions. To see it conspired against by surrounding nations, divided by domestic feuds, forsaken by it's friends, and derided by it's enemies. It may be, fear at times has been ready to seize you, and tempt you to ask what will be the end of these things ? The sounds of *Nineveh is fallen, Babylon is fallen*, yea of *JUDAH is fallen* have been long since heard in the world ; and what, say you, are we better than they ? Under these exercises, brethren, we trust you have found, and will yet find, hope of excellent use to you. Great have been the deliverances your God hath wrought in former ages, which afford a ground of hope to us. He can defend our coasts, and still preserve our country: yes, he can, and blessed be his name for any encouragement afforded us. Let us then hope and pray: *It may be the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of his people.* † Or should he refuse that, should a consumption be decreed to overflow in righteousness, still, he can preserve his faithful followers as he did *Baruch*, and those who *sighed and cried*, in the day of Jerusalem's ruin. Nay, suppose him to refuse that, suppose that not only your country must sink, but you must sink with it, and perish in the general wreck ! Still all is not lost. Did your portion lie in this world, then indeed, like the owner of a vessel whose all is on board, you might dread it's sinking: but seeing your inheritance is far beyond the reach of these vicissitudes, there is reason for you to mingle joy with trembling. Yes, brethren, we trust there is reason for you to unite with holy David, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble—therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea* !

Once more. You and we all, by some means, must shortly *die*. Be it so that no untimely end befall us, the hour cometh when we must bid farewell to every creature comfort ; when every created union must be dissolved, and we appear before the judgement-seat of Christ ! Oh, then to be without hope ! better had we never been born ! Let the reluctance and horror of those who are *driven* away in their wickedness teach us the value of a well-grounded hope in that awful hour. Verily words cannot describe it, nor thoughts conceive it ! Here is a rock when all beside sinks under us ! With this, brethren, like the priests that bear the ark of God, your feet will stand firm amidst all the swellings of Jordan ! With this you can behold the ghastly spectre, yea the horrors of the grave itself, with a cheerful countenance, and sing with holy Job, *Although after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me* !

From the whole, permit us to advise and exhort you, dear brethren, to a few things which become persons who have expectations like yours.—While you guard against presumption, beware of *despair*. The latter as well as the former is dangerous to men, and offensive to God. Despair

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is the death of action. To despair of mercy, and so never apply for it, is to act like the wicked and slothful servant, than which nothing tends more to cast reproach on the character of God. Even a *man* of honour cannot bear to be mistrusted. While fear keeps you from presumption, let hope preserve you from despair. As condemned criminals in yourselves considered, cast yourselves on him for mercy; as servants, serve him cheerfully and rely on his bounty; and as suffering the loss of all things for him, trust him, like Moses, to make up your losses. Remember *The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.**

Observe also, he that hath this hope must *purify himself as Christ's pure.*† He must take him for his example, and aim at no less than a complete conformity to his temper and spirit. That which true hope centres in, is not only to see him as he is, but to be *like him*. Be constant then, dear brethren, in holy exercises. We trust your hope is not of that kind, which in proportion as it encreaseth, slackens the hand of diligence. Neglect neither public nor private duties; it is at the peril of your soul's welfare if ye do! Shame may keep you to the one, but rather let the love of Christ constrain you to both. Think nothing too great to perform, too much to loose, or too hard to endure, that you may obtain so blessed an hope. O brethren, be it our daily concern and earnest endeavour to grow in every grace, to excell in every virtue. Remember he whose eyes are flames of fire, surveys our heart and life: how transporting the thought, could we conceive him addressing each of us as he did the Thyatirian Church, *I know thy works, and charity; and service, and faith; and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first!*

Finally. Use all means to cultivate this heavenly grace. Remember sin is it's worst enemy; beware of that.—The Holy Spirit is it's best friend; see that you grieve not him. Tribulations themselves, though they may seem to destroy it, in the end cherish it. They work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; therefore be reconciled to them.—Read the holy scriptures—pray in secret as well as openly—though sojourners on earth, let your conversation be in heaven—learn to set light by this world; nor court it's smiles, nor fear it's frowns—live in daily expectation of dying; and die daily in humble expectation of living for evermore—realize and anticipate those enjoyments and employments to which ye are hastening; in proportion to this, your desires will be strong and your hopes lively—remember it is one of those graces that must do it's all within the limits of time; be sober therefore, and hope to the end—aim, like Enoch, to walk with God, till God shall take you—let your loins be girt, and your light's burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find so doing! *Verily I say unto you, said this blessed Lord of yours, (O hearken, and be astonished!) verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them!*

Dearly beloved brethren, farewell! May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work!

Signed on behalf of the brethren,

ANDREW FULLER, Moderator.

BREVIATES.

* Ps. cxlvii. 11. † 1 John iii. 3.

B R E V I A T E S.

We met on *Tuesday* evening at the usual hour, and after spending some time in prayer, a moderator was chosen, the letters from the churches were read, and minutes were taken of their contents, the opportunity being concluded with prayer.

On *Wednesday* morning we met for prayer about six, wherein several brethren were engaged.

The public meeting began about ten; many more people attended than the meeting-house could contain; convenient seats were made for them in a yard behind it, and the ministers standing in the window, from which the lights were taken out, the people could hear both within and without. Our brother Ryland, junior, of Northampton, prayed—after which brother Gill, of St. Alban's, gave a brief account of the design of the association, and prayed—brother Hopper, of Nottingham, then preached from Ps. lxxxv. 6. *Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee*—brother Evans, of Foxton, prayed—and brother Guy, of Sheephead, preached from 2 Peter iii. 18. *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen*—and concluded in prayer.

At five in the evening, brother Ryland, senior, of Northampton, began in prayer—brother Fuller, of Soham, preached from 1 Cor. xiv. 20. *Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men*—brother Hall, senior, of Arnsby, concluded in prayer.

Thursday morning we met again for prayer, and to hear the circular letter, which was approved, and ordered to be signed by the moderator in behalf of the assembly—after which we proceeded, as usual, to communicate to each other some account of our experiences, as ministers, during the course of the last year, which practice we find truly advantageous. About twelve, the association was concluded in prayer by the moderator.

State of the churches since the last association:

Added on profession of faith and experience,	- - -	39
By letters of recommendation from other churches,	- - -	7
Restored to communion,	- - -	1
		47
Dead,	- - -	25
Dismissed to other churches,	- - -	13
Excluded from church relation,	- - -	17
		55
Decrease,	- - -	8

The state of our churches as above; the state of religion in general; and the state of our public affairs, as a nation; call us to humiliation and prayer.—O brethren, cry earnestly to him by whom alone *Jacob can arise when he is small*, that he would indeed *revive us again*. It is proposed to your consideration, whether the *first Wednesday* in every month may not be a convenient time, for us unitedly to address the throne of grace, on these affairs.

N. B. The next association to be held at ST. ALBAN'S, on *Wednesday* in *Whitsun-Week*. Brother Hall, senior, of Arnsby; and brother Ryland, junior, of Northampton, to preach; in case of failure, brother Sutchiffe, of Olney; and brother Evans, of Foxton.—Put up at the White-Hart.

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